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## **New koala Chlamydia vaccine project trialed at Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital**

Vets, vet nurses, **University of the Sunshine Coast** PhD students and a group of onlookers watched in anticipation as the **newest koala Chlamydia vaccine** was recently trialed at the **Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital**.

The vaccine is currently the newest and most advanced vaccine composition in existence and the Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital hosted the world-first administration of the new version. It was the first full medical trial following a smaller test that took place in Lismore last year - building on efforts over the past seven years to develop a successful vaccine for koalas.

Previous vaccine trials have focused on healthy koalas or animals with infection but no clinical disease, whereas this trial aims to vaccinate koalas that already have Chlamydia and thereby halt, and even reverse the effects of the disease.

The chlamydial disease primarily affects koalas in three different ways; conjunctivitis which can become so severe that it causes blindness, inflammation of the bladder and cystic reproductive tract disease in females causing infertility.

Flann the koala was the patient who received the injection of the new vaccine; he will be the first of a study of 30 individuals in this ground-breaking trial. Flann was brought into the Wildlife Hospital after rescuers noticed symptoms of conjunctivitis in his left eye. Flann was the perfect candidate for the treatment as he suffers from mild grade 1 Chlamydia, making signs of improvement more detectable.

Flann will be closely monitored for the next six weeks, with weekly swabs, blood work and photos being taken to assess the success of the vaccine. Once his conjunctivitis has cleared and he is fit to return to the wild, his progress will be monitored.

Professor of Microbiology at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Peter Timms, has been working with PhD student Sharon Nyari, Research Fellow Dr Courtney Waugh and others to conduct this research and is elated to announce that the first full trial has begun.

“The koala Chlamydia vaccine trial being conducted at the Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital in conjunction with the University of the Sunshine Coast is a very important and exciting step in the development of a chlamydial vaccine for koalas.

“The support provided by the Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital is critical in conducting this trial and Dr Rosie Booth and Dr Amber Gillett at the Wildlife Hospital have been invaluable in making this trial possible,” said Peter.

Dr Rosie Booth, Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital Director had the honour of administering the vaccine and is optimistic for what this could do for koala conservation.

“With 38% of koala admissions at the Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital from July 2014 to July 2015 due to Chlamydiosis, this vaccine is a groundbreaking first step towards reducing the number of diseased koalas we’re seeing and creating healthier koala populations in the wild,” said Rosie.

This exciting trial is also being supported by numerous groups that have contributed to the development of the vaccine over the past seven years, including Redland City Council, QUT, Lone Pine Koala Sanctuary, Endeavour Veterinary Ecology, Moreton Bay Regional Council, Gold Coast City Council, Queensland Department of Transport & Main Roads, Department of Environment & Heritage, Queensland and Australian Government Funding Schemes, Friends of the Koala, Lismore, Koala Action Group, and VIDO, Canada.

**Vision credit: Australia Zoo**

**Download video:**

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/9fout1rg40r7jhy/Koala%20Vaccine%20Trial%20-%20media%20release.mp4?dl=0>

**Photo credit: Ben Beaden / Australia Zoo**

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For media enquiries about the Australia Zoo Wildlife Hospital, please contact:

**Elisha Dyck**

**Public Relations Executive, Australia Zoo**

Tel: 07 5436 2120 Mob: 0400 404 809 Email: [elishad@australiazoo.com.au](mailto:elishad@australiazoo.com.au)